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# ■ LUCY TERRY

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Poet



*August 'twas the twenty-fifth,  
Seventeen hundred forty-six;  
The Indians did in ambush lay,  
Some very valiant men to slay.*

Thus began Lucy Terry's poem "Bars Fight." The poem was about an Indian massacre of white settlers at Deerfield, Massachusetts, in August 1746. "Bar" was a colonial term for meadow, and a section of Deerfield was then referred to as "the Bars." Terry's poem was the first poem known to be composed by an African-American woman.

Lucy Terry was only five years old when she was snatched from her family in Africa and brought to America by slave traders in 1735. You can imagine how terrified she must have been. Fortunately, she was bought by Ebenezer Wells of Deerfield, Massachusetts. He made her a household slave and treated her kindly. While still a small child, she was baptized a Christian in the Puritan church. According to church records, when Terry was about 14 years old, she was accepted as a full member of the church.

Some sources believe Lucy Terry was only 16 when she wrote her famous poem. Others say she was older. Regardless, her poem about the attack that took the lives of a number of white

settlers in Deerfield ranks her as an outstanding African American of the colonial period. For more than 100 years, the poem was passed along orally. It was not until 1855 that the poem appeared in print.

In 1756, Terry married Abijah Prince. He also was a captured African slave, who eventually managed to purchase his freedom. It is not clear whether Prince bought Terry's freedom or if Wells granted her freedom before their marriage. In the mid-1700s, Abijah and Lucy Prince moved to Vermont. They had raised six children, one of whom received a government pension for his fighting in the Revolutionary War.

In addition to being recognized as a poet, Lucy Terry Prince won fame as a gifted speaker. She once even argued a case before the United States Supreme Court. The lawsuit involved a neighbor in Vermont who tried to steal land from the Princes. Lucy Terry Prince presented her case so well that she won even though she argued against two of the most prominent lawyers in her state. Her oratory skills won the praise of Samuel Chase, who was the chief justice of the Supreme Court at the time.

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## ■ COMPREHENSION ACTIVITY

Mark each of the following statements either **T** (true) or **F** (false).

- \_\_\_ 1. "The Bars" was the name of a tavern in Deerfield, Massachusetts.
- \_\_\_ 2. Lucy Terry was brought to America when she was 16.
- \_\_\_ 3. The man who bought Lucy Terry was named Ebenezer Wells.
- \_\_\_ 4. Lucy Terry was an elderly lady when she wrote her famous poem.
- \_\_\_ 5. More than one hundred years passed before Lucy's poem was printed.
- \_\_\_ 6. Abijah Prince was once chief justice of the United States Supreme Court.
- \_\_\_ 7. Lucy Terry gained her freedom by running away from her owner.
- \_\_\_ 8. Lucy Terry's poem was about an Indian attack on a group of white settlers.
- \_\_\_ 9. When she was 14 years old, Lucy became a full member of the Puritan church.
- \_\_\_ 10. Lucy Terry Prince once argued and won a case before the United States Supreme Court.
- \_\_\_ 11. Lucy and her husband, Abijah, raised six children.
- \_\_\_ 12. One of their sons fought in the Revolutionary War.

## ■ SOMETHING TO DO

Find a copy of "Bars Fight" either in a book or on the Internet. Write a one- or two-paragraph summary of it.

## ■ THINKING CAP

Write a short paper explaining why Lucy Terry Prince might have been treated differently had she been a slave in one of the southern colonies.

# ■ CRISPUS ATTUCKS

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## Patriot

A large black man stood at the front of the mob shouting and waving a stick of firewood. The object of his anger was a small group of British soldiers standing near the sentry box in front of the Boston Customs House.

“You Lobster backs! Bloody backs! Cowards!” he and others in the crowd yelled at the soldiers. (Lobster backs and bloody backs were names the colonists had given to the British troops because of the red jackets they wore.)

The large black man was Crispus Attucks, the son of an African-American slave and a Natick Indian. Although he grew up as a slave, he ran away from slavery by joining the crew of a whaling vessel that sailed out of Boston Harbor some 20 years prior to the American Revolution. When the first shots of the Revolution were fired, Attucks was the first to fall—becoming not only the first black American to die fighting the British, but the first of any race to give his life in the cause of American freedom.

The event that brought about the deaths of Attucks and four others is referred to as the “Boston Massacre.” On March 5, 1770, an angry

mob confronted a lone sentry in front of the Customs House. They shouted insults and pelted the sentry with rocks and chunks of ice. When the frightened soldier called for help, his commanding officer and seven other British soldiers appeared on the scene. No amount of persuasion on the part of the officer in charge could make the crowd leave.

“You Lobster backs! Bloody backs! Cowards!” Attucks shouted, waving his stick of firewood. Then, turning to the mob behind him he said: “Don’t be afraid. They dare not fire!” Crispus Attucks stood so close to the British soldiers that the bayonet of a rifle almost touched his chest.

But they did fire. What happened is not clear. Captain Thomas Preston, the officer in charge, later testified that he gave no order to fire. Perhaps the first soldier to do so thought he heard that command over the din of the crowd. No matter, shots rang out, and Crispus Attucks was killed instantly. Samuel Gray, a supporter who tried to assist Attucks, was also fatally shot. A number of others fell, bleeding in the snow. Three more died later.

Crispus Attucks was hailed as a hero. At a memorial service, he was praised for his bravery. A poet later wrote that he was “the first to defy and the first to die.” And the Boston Massacre became known as one of the first battles to signify the beginning of the American Revolution.

